Keeping You in the Know
U.S. Department of Energy
Environmental Management Recovery Act
NEWS FLASH
October 26, 2010

Recovery Act Accelerates Construction of Wells at NNSS

Well Development and Testing
The purpose of well development is to clean up remnants from drilling activities and ensure well water is reflective of water within the intended monitoring zone. Groundwater experts collect raw data, such as water rates, pressure, and chemistry, during the testing phase. The testing helps scientists create computer-generated visuals, or models, of the NNSS subsurface.

LAS VEGAS – Groundwater experts at the Nevada National Security Site (NNSS, formerly named the Nevada Test Site) have put American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds to good use, accelerating the construction schedule for two new groundwater characterization wells that will help NNSS study groundwater contaminants.

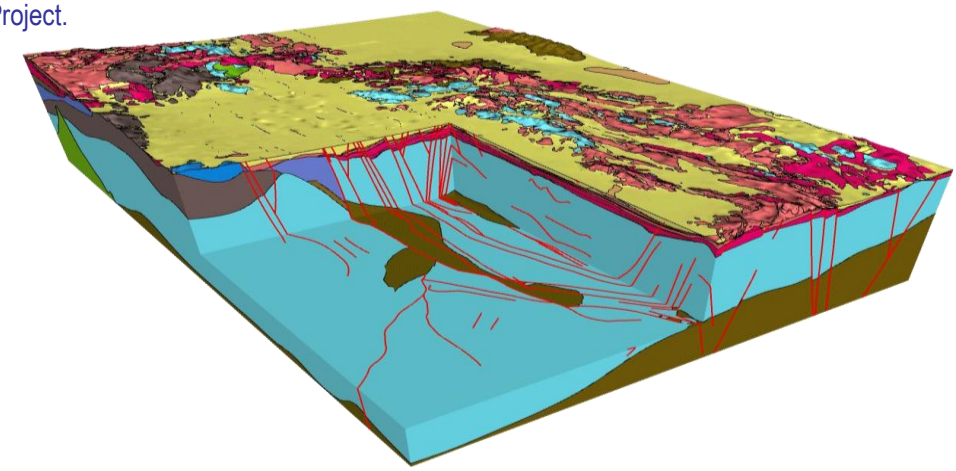
"We have been able to accelerate drilling on these two wells by about one year thanks to the Recovery Act funds," Federal Sub-Project Director Bill Wilborn said. "Well monitoring helps improve data collection and our understanding of underground contamination to better clean up the environment and protect public health."

Of the $44 million in Recovery Act funds NNSS received for ongoing environmental restoration work, $12.5 million has gone to the Underground Test Area Sub-Project. In the project, the experts study groundwater to understand the movement of radiological contaminants relating to historic nuclear testing.

The Recovery Act is funding the construction of two wells. Eight other wells are being funded by annual Office of Environmental Management appropriations. Workers are in the midst of a three-year effort to construct all ten wells in the northwestern region of NNSS known as Pahute Mesa. Scientists determined that geologic data from this area will help refine a computer model, which is a sophisticated imaging tool used to forecast the location and future movement of contaminants in complex geological settings.

Construction of the first Recovery Act-funded well was completed in the fall of 2009. Drilling of the second Recovery Act well is currently under way and is scheduled for well development and testing in 2012. Six of the 10 Pahute Mesa wells are in place and in different stages of development and testing. These wells join a network of more than 90 wells located on or near the NNSS that are used in the Underground Test Area Sub-Project.

Workers built ER-20-8, the first of two Recovery Act-funded wells, in the fall of 2009.



The Recovery Act funded the construction of wells that will add data to computer-generated, three-dimensional visual models that help scientists understand subsurface contaminant movement. Soil and rock layers are grouped by hydraulic properties and represented by different colors. The red lines represent faults.